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## Real World Examples

*In this section you will find descriptions of several folic acid promotion programs conducted in different areas of the United States. Each campaign offers a wealth of creative ideas and approaches to spreading the message about the benefits of folic acid and motivating women capable of becoming pregnant to increase their consumption of vitamin supplements and fortified foods.*



### One Message Sent Out Many Different Ways

Onondaga County Health Dept.

Syracuse, NY

Lloyd Novick, MD, MPH

Commissioner of Health

Amanda Nestor, MSW, CSW, Program Coordinator

Phone: 315-435-3252 Fax: 315-435-5720

**Y**ou can develop a far-reaching, innovative folic acid education program with the aid of numerous community partners. Dr. Novick's team enlisted the local chapter of the March of Dimes, many community organizations, hospitals, pharmacies, schools, grocery stores, retail stores, medical societies, and managed care organizations. These organizations provided channels to deliver the folic acid message. Women in the community had multiple opportunities to hear the message.

Such repetition of a message is an effective way to reach a target audience. The following is a brief summary of ways in which the various partners in this program delivered their message:

**Media Activities**

- Press conferences, news releases, articles
- Public service announcements
- Program representatives appearing as guests on radio call-in shows
- Program representatives appearing as featured guests on TV shows

**Involvement of Medical/Managed Care Providers**

- Meetings with folic acid as the subject
- Newsletters, articles, letters
- Posters, flyers, pamphlets, buttons, videos
- Prescription pads with folic acid prescriptions already printed
- Folic acid education requirements as a part of HMO/PPO contract negotiations

**Activities in Pharmacies**

- Folic acid brochure with each prescription dispensed
- Discount coupons for store-brand multivitamins
- Folic acid message incorporated in advertisements
- Distribution of promotional/educational materials

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**Projects in Grocery Stores**

- Folic acid highlighted in articles in weekly circulars
- Folic acid message incorporated in TV, radio, and newspaper ads
- Folic acid message printed on grocery bags
- Audio messages on in-store PA/radio systems
- Folic acid ads on shopping carts
- Discount coupons on in-store products containing folic acid
- Seasonal produce display highlighting folate-rich fresh fruits and vegetables

**Ventures with Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)**

- Posters, buttons, brochures, video, newsletter messages on folic acid
- Message on WIC check holders
- Farmer's market coupons for foods rich in folate
- Screening for intake of foods rich in folate
- Displays of folic acid sources

**Endeavors in Schools**

- Educational training for teachers
- Message included in lesson plans in health and other classes
- Orange juice served in classes along with a lesson on folic acid
- Poster contests and displays
- Articles in staff and parent newsletters
- Instructional videos
- Information distributed to student health clinics in schools and colleges



**Projects at Other Sites**

- Paycheck inserts at work sites
- Posters/brochures at
  - Health clubs
  - Weight loss centers
  - Laundromats
  - Beauty salons
  - Churches
  - Restaurants
  - Bookstores
  - Food banks
  - Buses and taxi cabs
- Billboards





## Focus Your Campaign Around a Celebrated Event

Oklahoma State Department of Health  
Maternal and Child Health Service  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma  
Kay Pearson, MS, RD, LD, Coordinator  
Birth Defects Registry  
Phone: 405-271-6617 Fax: 405-271-4892

**F**ocusing your folic acid prevention campaign around a well-received, celebrated event such as Mother's Day, Valentine's Day, or Grandparents' Day brings positive attention to folic acid in your community. The Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH), in collaboration with the Oklahoma Pharmacists Association and the March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation, kicked off its campaign around Valentine's Day. On February 10, the OSDH issued a news release stressing the importance of women taking folic acid before they become pregnant. The message ended with, "This is a gift we can give ourselves and future generations of Oklahomans. Happy Valentine's Day! Folic Acid—Take it to Heart!"

In March for St. Patrick's Day, a news release from the Commissioner of Health, J. R. Nida, MD, reminded all women between their teens and their forties to take at least 0.4 milligram of folic acid each day. This message ended with, "This St. Patrick's Day wear a green ribbon. You can celebrate St. Patrick's Day and help the March of Dimes and the Oklahoma State Department of Health spread the

word about folic acid.” The March of Dimes green ribbon campaign was developed to raise awareness and support for the prevention of NTDs and treatment of children with spina bifida. Green ribbons were made available, and people were encouraged to wear them.

Dr. Nida then proclaimed May, the month in which Mother’s Day occurs, as Neural Tube Defect Prevention Month in Oklahoma. Colorful posters, buttons, and pamphlets were mailed to county health departments in April for use in May. Every pharmacy and many grocery stores, self-service laundries, physician offices, and other public locations throughout the state were mailed a poster and educational Mother’s Day cards. Announcements on grocery bags and billboards were also prepared. The news release from Dr. Nida in May suggested that “(t)he ideal gift for women between their teens and forties is a bottle of multivitamins containing at least 0.4 milligram of folic acid.” He also encouraged women to take this vitamin daily, even if they were not planning to become pregnant, since half of all pregnancies are not planned.

Other suggested promotional ideas included:

- Holding a “Happy Mother’s Day! Folic Acid—Make It A Habit” raffle drawing, and giving away a one-year supply of multivitamins containing 400 micrograms of folic acid to women in the community.
- Giving a one-year supply of multivitamins with folic acid to all women getting married.





## A Low-Budget Campaign Well-Planned From Beginning To End

Region 1 Perinatal Coordinating Council  
Abingdon, Virginia  
Buckey Boone, BA  
Kristin Broome, MPH  
Phone: 540-676-4501 Fax: 540-676-0512

Southwest Virginia's Folic Acid campaign was initiated by the Region 1 Perinatal Coordinating Council (RPCC) and funded by the March of Dimes, Virginia Chapter. Public education activities were designed to increase awareness and promote behavior changes concerning folic acid intake. Educational materials were tested for readability and pretested for an effective and appropriate message. The main message stated, "Spread the Word: Folic Acid Prevents Birth Defects." Consumption of a daily multivitamin was emphasized in the campaign, and a diet high in folic acid was discussed often. Following is a list of campaign activities:

- A banner designed for local health departments.
- Training for health departments and rural health clinic staff.
- A "Health Tip" focus on folic acid in hospital and pharmacy newspaper ads.
- A conference focused on folic acid and perinatal nutrition with guest speaker, Dr. Godfrey Oakley, from CDC.
- Initiation of the March of Dimes Green Ribbon Campaign.



- A news conference for all media.
- Public service announcements produced by local theater students.
- Posters and brochures produced and distributed by local nursing students and volunteer organizations.
- Radio and TV interviews introducing the folic acid message.
- A TV community calendar displaying folic acid activities.
- A one-day campaign in nine grocery stores to distribute information cards, green ribbons, and flyers and to display banners and labels for food high in folic acid.
- Presentations and folic acid information packets were provided to teachers in all schools from the fifth grade through the college level, including vocational schools. Packets contained folic acid and neural tube defect information, pre- and post-tests, lesson plans, enrichment activities, the campaign's video PSA, and a display board.
- A display board designed for use at health and county fairs, schools, and conferences.
- Local pharmacies and pharmaceutical companies provided samples of multivitamins.

This campaign ended in January 1998. A random telephone sample pre- and post-test survey of the target population was conducted to show the campaign's effectiveness. The evaluation results showed a 23% increase in folic acid awareness, a 20.1% increase in knowledge about folic acid and its benefits, and an 11% increase in folic acid use among the target population over a one-year period.



## See Results From a Long-Term Commitment to NTD Prevention

Utah Department of Health

Disabilities Prevention Program

Salt Lake City, Utah

Marcia Feldkamp, PA, MSPH, Epidemiologist

Frederick I. White, Ed.D, Program Manager

Phone: 801-538-6953 Fax: 801-538-9448

In January 1995, Utah's Folic Acid Educational Campaign held planning sessions on how to increase awareness among women in their childbearing years. Statewide education was initiated in January 1996 in conjunction with the Mothers' March of the Utah Chapter of the March of Dimes. Volunteers went house to house throughout the state to request donations, discuss folic acid, and leave brochures on folic acid. Public service announcements were broadcast statewide on TV and radio. A fact sheet, poster, and newsletter articles were created, along with a bookmark targeting women who were not contemplating pregnancy but who were capable of becoming pregnant.

The second year of the campaign (1997) focused on educating health care providers (in addition to women of childbearing age) about the use of folic acid and the importance of consuming this vitamin prior to conception. Brochures were sent to health care providers and health care clinics in Utah. Folic acid fact sheets and bookmarks were provided to marriage license bureaus, and articles

were provided to employers for inclusion with employee paychecks. Bookmarks and posters continued to be distributed statewide to bookstores, libraries, family planning clinics, community clinics, and local health clinics as well as to speakers and organizers of community events, such as health fairs.

In addition to the various state health department agencies involved, several community and state partners participated in getting the message out. The Spina Bifida Association, the March of Dimes, the University of Utah Health Sciences Center, the Utah Broadcasting Association, Kinkos Copying Center, bookstores, Planned Parenthood clinics, and marriage license bureaus, as well as private businesses contributed to the effort.

In the first year and a half that Utah's Folic Acid Educational Campaign existed, the percentage of women aware of the benefits of folic acid increased from 38.5% to 47.1%.





## Collaborate in New Ways

Georgia Folic Acid Task Force

Shira Ledman, MSW, Chair

Executive Director, Spina Bifida Association of Georgia

1605 Chantilly Dr.

Atlanta, GA 30324

Phone: 404-636-6212 Fax: 404-636-6543

In 1998, the Georgia Folic Acid Task Force conducted a two-week educational campaign that began with the March of Dimes Walk America Day and concluded with Mother's Day. The Task Force planned and implemented several activities to promote the consumption of folic acid by all women of childbearing age:

- Georgia Governor Zell Miller proclaimed May as "Folic Acid Month."
- Task Force members hand-delivered press kits to radio and television stations throughout the state.
- At many of the 25 March of Dimes Walk America sites, volunteers wore shirts bearing the campaign message, "Folic Acid: A Vitamin for Life," and staffed display tables with folic acid brochures and posters. Some walk-site tables had special events. One site distributed orange juice samples provided by the Florida Department of Citrus; another site held cooking demonstrations with folate rich foods.
- Additional volunteers set up 112 community display tables throughout Georgia. WIC Clinic and Women's Health employees, FHA (Future Homemakers of America) groups, and high school students in family and consumer science classes staffed these tables and helped publicize the campaign message.

- Task Force members displayed folic acid information and gave speeches at professional conferences.
- The Georgia Unit of Teleflora (a floral delivery wire service) encouraged member florists to enclose a folic acid message with each Secretary's Day and Mother's Day arrangement. The Task Force designed and supplied the business-size cards with the folic acid message. Florists also received a folic acid fact sheet, a Task Force fact sheet, a campaign press release, a stamped evaluation post card, and a campaign endorsement memo from the Georgia Teleflora leadership.

As plans for the campaign progressed, some family and consumer science teachers decided to include messages and projects related to folic acid in their curricula. When the Task Force requested volunteers to staff community display tables during the two-week campaign, the family and consumer science teachers encouraged students to participate. Students at one high school staffed folic acid tables at their local grocery store and plan to enter their display in the regional FHA competition. The students will participate in the "Illustrated Talk" area of the competition. They will give a speech about folic acid and demonstrate how they shared this information with their classmates and community. By taking part in the campaign and the competition, students learned about and spread the word regarding the importance of folic acid. High school-age women are a very important target for the folic acid message.





## Start Young: A School Intervention

Puerto Rico Department of Health

Idalina Montes-De Longo, MD

PRDH, Folic Acid Campaign Coordinator

PO Box 70148

San Juan, Puerto Rico 00936

Phone: 787-758-1836 Fax: 787-758-1836

**P**uerto Rico has a higher incidence of NTDs than most areas of the United States. In 1994, the Puerto Rico Department of Health (PRDH) began planning an island wide campaign for the prevention of NTDs. A public policy statement was issued encouraging the use of folic acid in all women of childbearing age from 10 years to 50 years. The PRDH developed a network of partners to support the campaign. Beginning in 1995, the following activities were initiated:

- A data collection system was established to track the occurrence of NTDs.
- Audience-appropriate educational materials (brochures, a video, slide show presentations, folders of information, buttons, and a poster) were designed and distributed. Health professionals received their supplies through training sessions and seminars. Women of childbearing age acquired the educational materials at training sessions, health fairs, and places women on the island frequent, such as grocery stores and pharmacies.



- Partnerships were developed with:
  - The Department of Education
  - Interagency groups
  - Private corporations
  - CDC
- 2000 health and education professionals were trained to educate women about folic acid.
- Miss Puerto Rico 1996 became a spokesperson for the folic acid campaign and participated in a public service announcement that has been shown in theaters island wide. Also, young adults with spina bifida have been actively involved with spreading the prevention message.
- A self-administered questionnaire, including questions from the BRFSS in Appendix G, was created to evaluate the effectiveness of the campaign.
- Folic acid tablets were distributed to medically indigent, reproductive-age women.

More than 63,000 babies are born annually in Puerto Rico. Seventy percent of pregnancies are unplanned, and approximately 20% of the live births occur in women 19 years or younger. Aware of a higher incidence of NTD affected pregnancies in younger women, the campaign committee collaborated in a special partnership with the Department of Education. Together, the partners planned three strategies to deliver the folic acid message to girls and young women. The first strategy was to include the folic acid message in the school health curricula at the elementary, intermediate, and high school levels. Now all female students in the public school system are educated about the need for daily folic acid supplements. The second strategy

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was to involve the school nutritionists to increase the amount of food folate in school lunches. As a result, folate-rich menus are offered at all school lunch programs in the island's public schools. The third strategy was to train adolescent peer leaders to spread the word. These peer leaders have interacted not only with members of their own grade levels, but those of other grade levels in their schools, too. They have also visited other schools in their districts to share information about the importance of folic acid.

Evaluation of this campaign demonstrated that the percentage of women who knew about the importance of taking folic acid increased from 49% in 1996 to 62% in 1997. Further program evaluation is being done as the campaign continues.



## Possibilities for Direct Folic Acid Supplementation and Evaluation in Family Planning Clinics

Georgia Department of Human Resources

Division of Public Health

Women's Health Section

Family Planning Program

Arminda Hicks, RN-C, NP, Director

2 Peachtree St., 10th Floor

Atlanta, GA 30303

Phone: 404-657-3139 Fax: 404-657-3152

**T**he Family Planning Program of the Georgia Department of Human Resources along with the Spina Bifida Association of Georgia, the Georgia Chapter of the March of Dimes, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention developed and organized an NTD prevention campaign for public health departments in Georgia. Components of the campaign include:

- A survey of women's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors about the prevention of NTDs with folic acid before they received education in the health departments.
- Educational brochures, posters, videos, and refrigerator magnets.
- Distribution of three-month supply of folic acid supplements and scheduled follow-up visits.



- A reassessment survey of women's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors about the prevention of NTDs with folic acid and an offer of an additional three months supply of folic acid supplements at each follow-up visit.

The measurable outcomes of this folic acid supplementation project are:

- The number of clients consuming an adequate amount of folic acid daily.
- The number of clients given folic acid.
- The number of clients continuing to take folic acid for a 12-month period.
- Changes in clients' knowledge about the benefits of folic acid.

Program personnel also gathered information about the reasons women do not consume adequate amounts of folic acid and about barriers to changing behavior. In addition, there are plans to obtain blood folate measurements from a sample of these women. These measurements could assess changes in women's use of folic acid supplements.

## **Selected Ideas for a Community-Based Folic Acid Promotion Program**

1. Ask your county executive, legislative leader, mayor, or town supervisor to proclaim a Folic Acid Awareness Week in your community. Use the sample proclamation provided in Appendix I. Then, plan a signing party, where people sign their names in support of the campaign, and invite interested organizations and possible partners.
2. Assemble representatives of interested organizations to discuss ways to promote the folic acid message. Consider working together on community outreach and education projects.
3. Provide local newspapers, television, and radio stations with information so they can create related stories. Help educate editors and reporters about how folic acid can help to reduce birth defects. Include the names and contact numbers of local parents who have had a child with an NTD and who have agreed to provide interviews.
4. Ask your county health officer or another recognized health care provider to talk with the media about the benefits of folic acid. Make all the necessary arrangements for the interview.
5. Complete the fill-in-the-blank news release provided in Appendix I. Hand deliver it to community page newspaper

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editors, local grocery chains, and local health organizations that provide information to patients.

6. Give copies of the public service announcements to radio and television public service program directors and ask that they air the spots during Folic Acid Awareness Week and throughout the year. Samples of PSAs are provided in Appendix I.

7. Conduct a letterwriting campaign on the benefits of folic acid. For example, write letters to the editor and opinion pieces for local newspapers, school boards, women's circulars, church bulletins, and medical association and girl scout newsletters. Sample letters are provided in Appendix I.

8. Design and send inserts in direct mailings, such as utility bills. A sample insert is provided in Appendix I.

9. Join with local physicians, allied health organizations, or health care facilities to develop a community speaker's bureau on folic acid.

10. Provide exhibits for health fairs in public places, such as shopping malls and schools.

11. Offer to provide guest speakers for meetings, classes, conferences, and other gatherings of groups in your community who reach any population of childbearing-age women during Folic Acid Awareness Week or throughout the year. A presentation guide is provided in Appendix I.



12. Meet with school cafeteria supervisors to talk about the benefits of foods with folic acid and encourage the inclusion of folic acid-rich foods in school menus. Meet with school nurses or health teachers to discuss ways to talk about folic acid to students. Guides to school presentations are provided in Appendix I.

13. Create for volunteers a pamphlet providing information about your birth defect prevention project, what neural tube defects are, how they can be prevented, and what volunteers can do to help your program. Hand out the pamphlets at health fairs, health care organizations that serve mothers and girls, hair and full service salons, workout facilities, and day care centers. A sample fact sheet for volunteers can be found in Appendix I.

## Ideas for Health Care Providers

1. Ask editors of medical newsletters, journals, or bulletins to print articles.
2. Gather a group of health care professionals in the community to be featured on local television and radio shows.
3. Convince medical providers to present the folic acid message to medical staff while on grand rounds, and create educational “prescription pads” as a reminder note to practitioners.
4. Provide packets of flyers, posters, articles, and buttons that health care providers can distribute.
5. Start a folic acid voice mail phone line at your clinic or local health department.

**For Family Planning Clinics/Teen Health Clinics/ Prenatal Clinics/Maternal Support Services/WIC Clinics/Managed Care Providers:** Develop a comprehensive package for health care workers to teach women about the need for folic acid. Have each health care professional wear a folic acid button while at work. Encourage workers to screen women for risk factors and folic acid intakes. Include information to support supplement use and dietary intakes of folic acid by identifying where to buy supplements in your community and which foods are high in folic acid.

**For Children’s Special Health Care Services:** Encourage local services to find out every woman’s history of NTD-related pregnancies and to provide each woman with information about folic acid.

**For Early Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Treatment Programs (EPSDT):** Provide information on folic acid to parents of children participating in screening program.

**For First Post-Partum Visit:** Provide information to midwives or medical OB/gyn office staff to pass on to new mothers as they resume sexual activity.

## Keep Up With New Campaign Ideas

- Call CDC to request its periodic "Dear Colleague" letter, which contains folic acid information in a newsletter format. Telephone: 770-488-7284
- Inform **CDC** of your own efforts so that we can share your ideas with others.

**Call: 770-488-7160**

**Fax: 770-488-7197**

**E-mail: Flo@cdc.gov**

**Write to: CDC Folic Acid Promotion/NTD Prevention Clearinghouse**

**4770 Buford Highway, N.E.**

**Mailstop F-45**

**Atlanta, GA 30341-3724**

- Watch for updates on the CDC Birth Defects Web Page:  
**[http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/programs/infants/brthdfct/prevent/ntd\\_prev.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/programs/infants/brthdfct/prevent/ntd_prev.htm)**  
Read down, then click on Birth Defects Prevention for further information and links.